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NEWS RELEASE

Paul J. McNulty, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, announced that a federal grand jury returned a 137-count indictment today charging 23 defendants with conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute cocaine, cocaine base ("crack"), marijuana, ecstasy and high-grade hydroponic marijuana; manufacturing and distributing the controlled substances; using communication facilities to facilitate those felony acts, and maintaining drug involved premises. The government is also seeking forfeiture. If convicted they face possible sentences of four years to life imprisonment and fines ranging from \$250,000 to \$4 million.

After a six-month investigation called "Operation Hard Roll'n", teams of law enforcement officers executed search warrants and made arrests last week in Virginia, North Carolina, New Mexico and California. These arrests resulted in the dismantling of a widespread drug trafficking organization operating in the South Hampton Roads area.

Those charged in the indictment are:

Allen Thomas Bailey, Jr. of Suffolk, Virginia;
Dewrel L. Burleson of Norfolk, Virginia;
Cedric Jerome Cherry of Aulander, North Carolina;
Melodie Hope Cotugno, a/k/a "Mel", of Norfolk, Virginia;
Thieu Minh Doan of Shiloh, North Carolina;
Victor Lee Edwards of Suffolk, Virginia;
Jonathan Rueben Epstein of Norfolk, Virginia;
Angelique Marie Esparcia, nee Vandeline", a/k/a "Angie", of Virginia Beach, Virginia;
Leon Martin Guanzon of Norfolk, Virginia;
Antonio Mequel Jenkins, a/k/a "Tone", "Tonio", of Virginia Beach, Virginia;
Harold Woodrow King, a/k/a "Buddy", of Virginia Beach, Virginia;
Jeffrey Alan Lewis of Chesapeake, Virginia;
Jenessa Merie Mann of Virginia Beach, Virginia;

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Markus Kenyatta McKleny, a/k/a "Mac Dog", "Man Man", of Virginia Beach, Virginia;
Thach Ngoc Pham, a/k/a "Ted", of Norfolk, Virginia;
Eric Saunders of Norfolk, Virginia;
Jonathon Thomas Schidle, a/k/a "Farm Fresh", of Norfolk, Virginia;
Marcus Snipes of Albuquerque, New Mexico;
Diane Lee Spencer, nee Klimczynski,, Virginia Beach, Virginia;
Ricky Summerville of Virginia Beach, Virginia;
Elizabeth Pool Thornton, a/k/a "Beth", of Virginia Beach, Virginia;
John Arthur Watts, a/k/a "JW", of Norfolk, Virginia.
Laura Jean Wright of Virginia Beach, Virginia;

Mr. McNulty stated: "This organization flooded the streets of South Hampton Roads with cocaine, crack, marijuana and ecstasy, yet its members lived inconspicuously in our midst. This case demonstrates how drug dealers and their facilitators can permeate our neighborhoods."

Joining in this announcement is Daniel Lee Cloyd, Special Agent in-Charge for the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Norfolk, who stated: "This is one of many, in a long line of, successful federal narcotics investigations conducted in the Hampton Roads area jointly by the FBI and the Norfolk Police Department. The coordinated investigation and arrests of these criminals would not have been possible without continuing cooperation between federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies."

Also joining in this announcement is Bruce P. Marquis, Chief of Police of the City of Norfolk, who stated: "The work of my dedicated major case unit and narcotics officers, who teamed with the FBI agents, proves that joint state and federal cooperation can handicap drug dealers by removing entire organizations from our streets. Now citizens who shop at the Military Circle Mall, frequent restaurants in Ghent, and enjoy the visiting and living in our great city of Norfolk, will be safer and more secure."

The investigation was conducted by the FBI, the Norfolk Police Department and the Virginia State Police. Assistant United States Attorney Kevin M. Comstock is prosecuting this case.

(It should be noted that defendants are considered innocent until proven guilty.)

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